

THE PROBLEM

Health Risks

Smoking in general kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined. Thousands more die from other tobacco-related causes, such as fires caused by smoking (more than 1,000 deaths/year nationwide) and smokeless tobacco use. In Maryland alone, 6,800 adults die every year from tobacco use.¹ The associated health care costs of tobacco related death and disease are nearly \$2 billion, placing an enormous burden on Maryland's economy. Many cigar smokers mistakenly believe that cigars do not pose the same health risks as cigarettes; however, cigars are just as dangerous and addictive as cigarettes.²

- ▶ Cigar smoking increases the risk of lung, mouth, throat, and other cancers
- ▶ Cigar tobacco has a high concentration of nitrogen compounds, some of the most potent cancer-causing substances known
- ▶ Because cigars contain more tobacco than cigarettes, and often burn for much longer, they give off greater amounts of secondhand smoke
- ▶ Cigar smoking is linked to gum disease and tooth loss

In the past, most cigar smokers didn't inhale because cigar smoke tends to irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and breathing passages. More recently, however, cigar companies have changed the fermenting process to make cigar smoke easier to inhale. This new fermenting process further enhances the flavor but also increases the levels of harmful ingredients.²

Cigar smokers who inhale have a *dramatically* increased risk of death from various cancers as opposed to non-smokers:²

- ▶ Seven times more likely to die from oral cancer
- ▶ Thirty-nine times more likely to die from cancer of the larynx (voice box)
- ▶ Three times the risk of death from pancreatic cancer
- ▶ Four times the risk of death from bladder cancer

Youth sometimes replace some of the tobacco found in cigars with marijuana. The flavors in the tobacco and wrapper mask the smell of marijuana. Additionally, in Maryland, youth who smoke tobacco products use marijuana and alcohol at significantly higher rates than non-smoking youth.

Flavors

Flavored cigars are commonly sold in characterizing flavors such as vanilla, orange, grape, chocolate, peach, cherry, and wine. These flavored products are particularly appealing to youth and are widely considered to be "starter" products that help to establish tobacco use habits that can often lead to a lifetime addiction to nicotine. Flavored products may even be used into adulthood to continue to mask the harsh taste of tobacco.

1 CAMPAIGN FOR TOBACCO FREE KIDS. The Toll of Tobacco in Maryland. Available at: http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/maryland.

2 AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY, Cigar Smoking. Available at: www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerCauses/TobaccoCancer/CigarSmoking/index

- ▶ **Flavored tobacco products appeal to kids**
- ▶ **They disguise the bad taste of tobacco**
- ▶ **Are just as addictive as non-flavored tobacco products**
- ▶ **Have the same harmful health effects as non-flavored tobacco product**

Although flavored cigar products are still on the market, steps have been taken to eliminate the use of flavored *cigarettes*. In part due to a recognition that flavored cigarettes entice youth to smoke, Congress passed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act in June 2009. As part of this law, beginning in September 2009, flavored cigarettes are no longer permitted to be sold in the United States.³ Eliminating all flavored tobacco products—including cigarillos and little cigars—would help to reduce the attractiveness of these products, potentially decreasing initiation of tobacco among youth.

Packaging

Cigarillos/Small Cigars are available for retail, individually, for less than \$1.00. A 2007 study surveying compliance checks in 500 retail facilities in Prince George's County found that single cigarillos constituted the lowest-priced and most commonly requested tobacco product by people believed to be under the age of eighteen. Although it is unlawful to sell cigars to minors, they remain unregulated in every other sense. Accordingly, small cigars and cigarillos have become the product of choice for teens and young adults, who are Maryland's most price-sensitive consumers. Single cigars are increasingly purchased for immediate consumption by youth.

Maryland prohibited the sale of single cigarettes, requiring that they be sold in packs of at least 20. By increasing the package size, the products become less accessible to underage youth due to higher pricing. Minimum package size requirements and bans on the sale of single tobacco products is recommended by leading tobacco control organizations—such as the Institute of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—as a strategy to reduce underage tobacco use.

Health Warnings

By law, cigarettes are required to have health warning labels showing that smoking causes lung cancer. No law requires health warnings on cigar packages and the consent agreement many cigar manufacturers signed does not require warnings on single cigars, which consumers already erroneously perceive as less hazardous than cigarettes. By increasing the minimum packaging quantity of small and little non-premium cigars, accessibility of cigars among underage youth will decline and a reduction in the purchase of these products would result.

Taxation

Maryland's cigarette excise tax is set at \$2.00 per pack to discourage cigarette smoking, particularly among youth. The low rate of tax on cigars and other non-cigarette tobacco products is only 15% of wholesale price (roughly equivalent to a tax of 33¢ per pack of cigarettes) making them much more affordable and easier to purchase. An increase of a tax rate to 70% of wholesale price for cigar products would bring parity among cigarette and cigar taxes.

³ FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION. Overview of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act. Available at: <http://www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/ucm246129.htm>